

HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL  
25 SHATTUCK STREET  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02115  
REGENT 4-3300

OFFICE OF THE DEAN

May 21, 1976

To the Deans of American Medical Schools:

Such wide publicity has been given to the article written by Dr. Bernard Davis and appearing in the NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE (Vol. 294, No. 20, May 13, 1976, p. 1118), that I feel compelled to write you in the hope that you and your admissions committee will not be misled by what I can only term irresponsible statements made by Dr. Davis. The article, entitled "Academic Standards in Medical Schools," purports to be a general commentary on the subject, but in fact is a thinly veiled criticism of the Harvard Medical School. He implies that academic standards at Harvard have fallen (unproven) and that some degrees have been granted on a charitable basis. He uses as a single example for the latter charge, the case of a student who had failed Part I of the National Boards five times but was ultimately granted the M. D. by vote of the Faculty. What he neglected to state, because he had not bothered to inform himself of the facts, was that the student in question was granted a degree only after a year of highly satisfactory clinical performance on the wards of a distinguished hospital, documented by letters from all the chiefs of service under

whom he served. Nor did Dr. Davis mention that the student had passed Part II of the National Boards. There is nothing to suggest that this man will be anything but a fine physician. To consider that he might be a danger to patients is ludicrous.


The facts are these: All Harvard medical students are judged by precisely the same academic standards in both the preclinical and clinical years. Some minority students have had academic difficulties along the way, and so have some white students. The faculty has never granted a degree to anyone on a "charitable basis." Dr. Ewalt, Senior Associate Dean for Clinical Affairs, and internship advisor, reviewed in its entirety every record of every medical student graduating in the Class of 1976, and he interviewed all fourth-year students. Not only did he judge that all were well qualified, but he was unable to distinguish between minority and majority students on the basis of their records.

The views expressed by Dr. Davis are his own and do not reflect those of the Faculty or the administration. Enclosed are copies of statements by the Faculty Council and the chairmen of all of the preclinical science departments. Both take issue with the conclusions implied in Dr. Davis' article. The effort of the Harvard Medical School to recruit

minority students has been a success, and the Faculty vouches for the competence of all its graduates. It is my profound hope that Dr. Davis' statements are not misconstrued by members of your faculty or by your admissions committee and are interpreted to mean that Harvard is drawing back from its commitment to minorities or that our minority graduates are any less competent than any others. Such is not the case. I also hope that you will continue your own efforts on behalf of minority students and will not permit the pronouncements by Dr. Davis to alter your present admission policies.

I would consider it a favor if you would share this letter with members of your admissions committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Robert H. Ebert", with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Robert H. Ebert, M. D.  
Dean